



[Chemotherapy for prostate cancer and COVID-19](#)

The correct name for the virus is SARS-coronavirus-2 and the disease it causes is Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19). SARS means Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome. Throughout the document this new (novel) disease will be referred to as [COVID-19](#).

This document is intended to provide general information and is not intended to replace medical advice. Prostate Scotland **cannot give individual advice or recommend which treatments might be suitable for an individual or recommend individual medical care or health professionals** – patients should always check with their urologist, oncologist, CNS or GP regarding treatments. As the following is general information, guidance and procedures for each health board may be slightly different. If you have been given specific advice from your urologist, oncologist, CNS or GP then you should always follow their advice.

Routine operations have been cancelled, but some cancer surgery is continuing. However, there are differences between health boards depending on availability of resources. The situation is constantly changing, and it is best to contact your urologist, oncologist or CNS who can advise on what is happening in your area.

We have compiled this information on [COVID-19](#) and [chemotherapy for prostate cancer](#) to the best of our knowledge and understanding at the present time. As the situation is constantly changing, almost on a daily basis, and as more knowledge and information become available, this information and guidance may change. We will try to keep you as up to date as possible.

Your cancer treatment plan is individual to you. In all cases, it is important to think about the risks and benefits. Since some cancer treatments make it more difficult to fight infection so there is a potential increased risk of infection with [COVID-19](#).

However, some men with [prostate cancer](#), due to age ie those over 70 and those with additional conditions such as diabetes, heart disease maybe more at risk of severe symptoms if they catch [COVID-19](#).

Your oncologist may want to [review your treatment plan](#) with you to ensure it still best suits your needs and will want to discuss any changes that may be appropriate for you. This will only ever be done to reduce overall risk and harm.

Certain treatments for cancer can affect how well the immune system works. In particular, this may be the case for those men having [chemotherapy](#) treatment for their prostate cancer. Their immune system may be affected and not work so well during their treatment and for a number of weeks or months afterwards. Those

having treatment(s) over a number of months may be at a greater risk of developing more severe complications if they contract [COVID-19](#) (or indeed colds, 'flu or tummy bugs) during their treatment.

Some people with specific cancers or on the 'very vulnerable list' (those who are shielding) should receive a letter from NHS Scotland outlining more specific advice to keep themselves safe. <https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-covid-19-shielding>

Your oncologist will try to minimise the time you spend in hospital departments, for example arranging telephone consultations and offering blood tests at a different NHS site. Make sure everyone involved in your care and treatment has your up-to-date contact details.

Who can I contact

Potentially your best point of contact for information in your particular circumstances will be your Clinical Nurse Specialist (CNS). As you will understand, NHS staff are under a great deal of pressure at the moment and you may not get through to speak to the CNS straight away. You may be asked to leave your name and telephone number so a member of staff can call you back or they may advise on an email address that you can reach the person on.

If you attend your [GP practice](#) for follow-up and treatments for your prostate cancer, then the GP or Practice Nurse may be the best person to contact. Again, you may be asked to leave your name and telephone number so a member of staff can call you back.

If your urologist, oncologist, CNS, GP or someone from the NHS is trying to get in touch with you, this may show on your phone as 'number withheld'. It may be best to answer 'number withheld' calls in this current situation, especially if you have left your name and number for a call back. They will let you know straight away who is calling.

You may receive a text from NHSNoReply. These are usually texts to give you information and don't allow you to get back in touch.

Another very helpful source of information is this leaflet produced by the Scottish Government: <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/advice-and-guidance/2020/03/coronavirus-covid-19-tailored-advice-for-those-who-live-with-specific-medical-conditions/documents/cancer/cancer/govscot%3Adocument/Cancer%2BPatient%2BInfo%2Bguidance%2B-%2B090420.pdf>

What is the policy about treatment currently?

NHS Scotland and the Scottish Government have stated that the NHS will continue to provide vital cancer treatments, and emergency and urgent care for all patients. If it becomes necessary, it will **prioritise** some patients for treatment based on need.

If you are being treated with [chemotherapy](#) or [radiotherapy](#), individual [decisions](#) based on the benefits and risks of treatment may have to be made with you as the rate of [COVID-19](#) infection in the community rises. Different therapy options involving fewer visits to hospital may be offered to you. A lot of surgical procedures may now carry far greater risks due to [COVID-19](#). Because of this, other treatment plans may be proposed and discussed with you.

Shielding – what is it, why is it essential and the recent change to this guidance

Please note. You can see the latest Scottish Government guidance on '[shielding](#)' You can also download the 2 page PDF route map on shielding.

On the 23rd July 2020, the Scottish Government announced that [shielding](#) is to be paused from **1.8.20**. You should receive a letter or SMS text message confirming the latest changes announced and that shielding is to be paused.

Some additional changes have now been announced to the original guidance on [shielding](#)

[As from 24.7.20](#) a number of changes were announced to the guidance on [shielding](#).

This includes being able to meet with up to **8** people from **2** other households each day **indoors**, being able to meet **outdoors** with up to **15** people from **4** other households, travel in a car with someone you don't live with, use public transport, go to pubs and restaurants staying in the outdoor areas, go to shops and indoor markets, go to the barbers or hairdresser and visit indoor attractions and if you live alone you can form an extended household with one other household. You should wear a face covering if you can't physically distance and face coverings are compulsory on public transport and in shops.

Continue to wash your hands with soap and water regularly especially when you get home if you've been out and about,

You can see more details in our 'Info Guidance' page on shielding [here](#).

You can also watch a video about shielding [here](#).

Further guidance about going out and about has been produced by the government:

1. A guide to help you understand what activities are safer than others can be found [here](#)
2. A tool to help you protect yourself during daily activities can be found [here](#)

A [workplace risk assessment tool](#) to help people consider their individual risk when returning to work is also available.

If you have not already registered with the SMS text service, then it may be worth considering doing so. A COVID-19 forecasting service for shielding is being developed and people who have been [shielding](#) will be informed through the SMS text service about the risk of being exposed to COVID-19 in their local area.

In the future, the Government is looking at other ways that shielding might change. As the situation changes and as more knowledge and information become available, guidance on shielding will change. We will try to keep you as up to date as possible with these changes.

For those people who are at very high risk of severe illness additional protection measures are advised which involves minimising all interaction between them and others (called shielding).

Those who are extremely vulnerable should:

- not leave their homes (please see guidance above as this has been updated)
- minimise all non-essential contact with other members of their household

For more information on shielding go to <https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-covid-19-shielding>

People who fall into this category will be contacted by the NHS by letter or email. Some people may find that they receive more than one letter if they have multiple 'shielding' conditions. 'Shielding' applies to men who are being treated by [chemotherapy](#) or their [prostate cancer](#).

If you discover that you are not on the 'very vulnerable list' and don't receive a letter, but think you should be, you should contact your GP, or you can register via the NHS111 website to receive a letter. Having this letter might be helpful in terms of getting priority for home deliveries etc.

Thank you to our NHS

We would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank **all** NHS staff throughout Scotland who are doing a wonderful job in extremely challenging, difficult and unprecedented circumstances who have been working tirelessly to support all patients.

Although the weekly Thursday night 'Clap for our Carers' has come to an end, join the nation on **Thursday 25th March 2021 at 8pm** to celebrate our carers in the '[Clap for our Carers Day](#)' – a date to put in your diary now.

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Registered Office Princes Exchange, 1 Earl Grey Street, Edinburgh EH3 9EE

Chemotherapy for prostate cancer and COVID-19

If you are being treated with [chemotherapy](#), individual [decisions](#) based on the benefits and risks of treatment may have to be made with you as the rate of [COVID-19](#) infection in the community rises.

[Chemotherapy](#) uses certain drugs (e.g. Docetaxel) to kill cancer cells wherever they are in the body. These drugs work by targeting and rapidly killing cancer cells as they grow and divide. At the same time [chemotherapy](#) drugs also damage healthy cells in your body including bone marrow cells. When bone marrow cells are damaged, they make fewer infection-fighting cells. This can leave you at greater risk from all types of infection during, and for a number of weeks or months after treatment has finished.

Those having treatment(s) over a number of months may be at a greater risk of developing more severe infections/complications if they contract [COVID-19](#) (or indeed if they catch colds, 'flu or tummy bugs) during their treatment.

Some men with prostate cancer being treated by [chemotherapy](#) are more likely to become seriously ill if they become infected with [COVID-19](#).

This is one of the reasons that the Scottish Government released information about 'shielding' and why it is so important to follow the guidelines.

<https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-covid-19-shielding>

Chemotherapy usually involves:

- Having a blood test often at the [GP practice](#) the day before your treatment
- Going into hospital or day bed area to have an infusion of the [chemotherapy](#) drugs for around an hour
- Being given [chemotherapy](#) treatments over the course of a few months according your particular circumstances

As you can see this involves a number of appointments which you may put you at more risk from catching [COVID-19](#) when being amongst other people and the potential serious consequences that this might have. The NHS wants to avoid this and substantially reduce the number of hospital or GP appointments. This is to keep everyone safe, help prevent the spread of [COVID-19](#) and help protect the NHS and staff from additional pressures.

[Treatment decisions](#) on [chemotherapy](#) will be made for each individual with input from the multi-disciplinary team (MDT) and will be discussed with the man/his family. This may possibly be done by a telephone call rather than a face-face appointment.

If you are about to start chemotherapy

Because of the higher risks of infection and the risk of becoming seriously ill if you become infected with [COVID-19](#) during [chemotherapy](#), someone from your oncology team will most likely get in touch to discuss whether your treatment will go ahead or will be postponed with an alternative treatment offered in the meantime.

In fact, if you don't hear, you may want to get in touch with the oncology team to discuss your options.

Your oncologist may feel it is better to delay the start of [chemotherapy](#) and discuss other treatment options for you. This is to put you at lesser risk from catching [COVID-19](#).

If you are already having chemotherapy

Someone from the oncology team will most likely get in touch with you to talk over the risks of either finishing your [chemotherapy](#) course early or continuing with your [chemotherapy](#). If you haven't heard from the oncology team then perhaps try to get in touch with them or perhaps the nurses who give you your [chemotherapy](#) to ask for more guidance on what to do.

There has been guidance issued to teams on how [chemotherapy](#) can continue while minimising the risks from [COVID-19](#).

If your [chemotherapy](#) is continuing and you have been prescribed any tablets to take at home during your [chemotherapy](#) treatment you should ask for more guidance and how you are able to get a prescription for these.

Potential changes that your oncology team *may* discuss with you depending on individual circumstances:

- Changing intravenous treatments (IV or by a drip) to injections or by mouth if these are alternatives for you.
- Selecting treatments that don't continue for such a long time.
- Repeat prescriptions of oral medicines or other at home treatments should where possible be provided without patients needing to attend clinics in person.
- Considering treatment breaks for long-term treatments when the risk of [COVID-19](#) is high.

Neutropenic sepsis

This is a serious side-effect of [chemotherapy](#) and needs to be treated as an emergency. If you think that you have developed neutropenic sepsis it is vital that antibiotic treatment is started straight away. It has **different symptoms** from COVID-19.

Neutropenic sepsis symptoms	COVID-19 symptoms
High temperature, above 37.8° C	High temperature or fever (temperature greater than 37.8° C)
Feverish – shivering, shaking, sweating	A new, continuous cough
Chills, feeling hot or flushed	Shortness of breath or difficulty in breathing
Feeling sick	Pressure on your chest
Headache, sore throat	Possibly loss of taste and smell
Low back pain, sore muscles	
Feeling generally unwell	

There is more information about neutropenic sepsis in our booklet on [chemotherapy](#) from pages 13-15. You can also find this on our website www.prostatescotland.org.uk/resources. If you think you have developed this complication you should get in touch with your [GP practice](#) or CNS. For more help and advice, you can also call the National Cancer Treatment Helpline on 0800 917 7711 or for those who attend the Beatson the Beatson Cancer Care Centre on 0141 301 7990.

Who should I contact if I become unwell or develop side effects while on treatment for cancer?

If you have chest pain, significant bleeding or you need immediate medical attention call 999.

If you have a temperature or shivering or 'flu-like symptoms while you are on treatment for cancer, or for any side-effects of drug treatment, call your local cancer treatment helpline, or the National Cancer Treatment Helpline on 0800 917 7711. They will ask a series of questions and will give advice or arrange for you to have a medical review at your nearest hospital.

For more information and support

Organisation	Website/email
Prostate Scotland	www.prostatescotland.org.uk
For information on support groups please see	www.prostatescotland.org.uk/help-and-support-for-you/support-groups
NHS Inform	www.nhsinform.scot/
24-hour national cancer treatment helpline	0800 917 7711

Scottish government	www.gov.scot/coronavirus-covid-19/ https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/advice-and-guidance/2020/03/coronavirus-covid-19-tailored-advice-for-those-who-live-with-specific-medical-conditions/documents/cancer/cancer/govscot%3Adocument/Cancer%2BPatient%2BInfo%2Bguidance%2B-%2B090420.pdf
NHS 24	www.nhs24.com or telephone number is 111
British Association of Urological surgeons (BAUS)	https://www.baus.org.uk/patients/covid19_patient_information.aspx
Cancer Support Scotland	www.cancersupportscotland.org/
Macmillan cancer support Support nurses	www.macmillan.org.uk
Cancer research UK Cancer information nurses	www.cancerresearchuk.org
The Beatson Cancer Treatment Helpline	For Beatson patients only 0141 301 7990
Maggie's Centres	www.maggies.org enquiries@maggies.org
Prostate Cancer UK	www.prostatecanceruk.org www.prostatecancer.org/coronavirus https://prostatecanceruk.org/get-support/our-specialist-nurses
For mental health help and information	
Mind	www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus-and-your-wellbeing/
Mental Health UK	https://mentalhealth-uk.org/help-and-information/covid-19-and-your-mental-health/
Breathing Space	Phone 0800 83 85 87 (6pm to 2am, weekdays and 24 hours at the weekend)

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SAMH	https://www.samh.org.uk/ SAMH (Scotland's mental health)
Samaritans Scotland	https://www.samaritans.org/scotland/samaritans-in-scotland/
For general information and help with money worries CAB Citizens Advice Bureau	www.citizensadvice.org.uk/scotland/

New national service

A new national helpline has been set up (as from 15.4.20) to provide vital help to those people who don't have a network of support (such friends, family, neighbours) but who are at high risk of contracting [COVID-19](#)

The helpline number is 0800 111 4000. The helpline is currently available from 9.00am to 5pm but there are plans to increase the number of hours the helpline will be available each day.

The service will offer help to those who do not have family/friends/other support, those who cannot get online, those who are over 70, those who are disabled, those who require the support of mental health services, or receive a 'flu jab for health reasons. This service is in addition to the support already available for people who have received letters advising them to [shield](#) themselves.

People who call this helpline (0800 111 4000) will be put through to their local authority who will help them get the service they need, such as:

- essential food and medication
- links to local social work services for vulnerable children or adults
- emotional support
- contact with local volunteer groups.

About this information

The information contained in this leaflet has been developed by Prostate Scotland and reviewed by members of our advisory group, [PAGES](#).

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